Oracy APPG

Written evidence

Members of the Oracy APPG will consider written, verbal and audio-visual evidence and oversee oral evidence sessions. All evidence will inform the final report.

The extended deadline for submitting written evidence is **20th September 2019**. We would appreciate if the submissions would follow the following guidelines:

- Be in a Word format
- No longer than 3000 words
- State clearly who the submission is from, and whether it is sent in a personal capacity or on behalf of an organisation
- Begin with a short summary in bullet point form
- Have numbered paragraphs
- Where appropriate, provide references

Please write your evidence below and email the completed form via email to inquiry@oracyappg.org.uk with the subject line of 'Oracy APPG inquiry'

Sandeep Kaur
Full name:

Highlands primary School
School or Organisation:

Deputy Head Teacher
Role:

Written evidence:

Oracy APPG's 2019 Inquiry: Speaking for Change
Highlands Primary School
Introduction

For three years in succession, our school has been awarded the Mayor of London's Schools for Success award - awarded in recognition of schools that make the greatest impact upon low prior attaining children. In accepting this award we were asked to provide a summary of the key strategies we employ at the school to enable these children to make such accelerated progress. We explained that we believe that children's talk is at the centre of all their learning and that our classrooms should have a greater emphasis on children's talk rather than teacher talk. This requires a re-conceptualisation of the role of the teacher – they are not there to fill their children with knowledge, their primary role is to facilitate quality talk to inspire and challenge children to think creatively. We believe that oracy is deeply embedded in the culture of the school for all learners- children and adults. As a school we have been leading the development of oracy teaching in Oslo schools for the past 5 years. Our methods for dialogic teaching have been shared both nationally and internationally and we believe that it is important for us share our philosophy.

1. **Value and Impact**

As a school we value oracy as, not just part of education but education itself. Through oracy children articulate their thinking and by tapping into the thinking processes of each child, we truly grow each learner. We believe oracy is not valued because it is not a concrete record of learning that can be shown to external stakeholders, however our core principle must be, what is in the best interests of the children? Written work is easily measurable, reading tests supposedly assess children's reading ability and this is what can become fixated upon in education- the high stakes accountability model. Nobody is going to assess the quality of talk in a school- why? It is not easily measurable. That should not be an excuse for oracy **not** being the crucial vehicle of learning. Through our research we came across the notion that in terms of social inequality,cultural capital is on a highly uneven playing field. By empowering our children with language capital, they stand a greater chance of levelling that playing field. Without an oracy rich curriculum children will lose the opportunity to metaphorically find their voice in this ever polarised world. Having strong oracy skills our children will be equipped to compete for places at the top universities and reflect their inner self out in to the world. Entering the world of work they will need to communicate effectively with others and develop strong social skills. Through an oracy rich curriculum we promote learning through social situations and our children have the opportunity to develop strong interpersonal skills. One of the greatest skills we have promoted through a strong oracy rich curriculum is listening skills. Children value what others have to say and feel that listening is integral to learning because if we only focus on what we want to say we repeat our own knowledge. By listening to others we add to our knowledge and understanding. This focus has also been very developmental for staff.

2. **Provision and access**

Over time at Highlands Primary School we have drawn upon research to develop our core principles of what quality talk should look like in each classroom. We feel that consistency of practice is key and that each child in every classroom deserves access to quality talk. We have drawn upon theories of situated learning and communities of practice to empower our staff to engage in deep reflection and collaborative professional dialogue. Below are our ten principles developed together by all staff.

1. **We give confidence and opportunities for our children to ask questions**

Children need to talk, and to experience a rich diet of spoken language, in order to think and learn, and the development of language is an integral part of our learners' cognitive development. We want our children to be talking about their learning and to have opportunities to ask questions.

2. **We include time for paired and group discussions and plan for opportunities to summarise and link learning through mini-reviews**

We believe that it is essential for children to have opportunities to work collaboratively and to learn from each other. Mini-reviews will give opportunities for teachers to effectively summarise and link learning for individuals, groups, and the class as a whole.

3. **We use a range of questioning strategies to ensure that all children are engaged in learning at all times**

Questioning is at the heart of learning and teaching and our lessons ensure that a rich range of questioning and opportunities to talk are provided in the following ways:
- wait time: all pupils have the opportunity to think before answering
- hands down, teacher selects pupil(s) to answer
- pupils encouraged to consult in their group/with a partner in order to formulate an answer
- teacher involves a number of pupils in the answer to a single question creating the opportunity for discussion eg. "What do you think?" "Do you agree with that answer?"
- use of wrong answers to develop understanding
- opportunities for pupils to formulate questions
- use of mini whiteboards

4. **We ask children how they feel about their learning**

It is always important to reflect upon how often we ask our pupils how they feel about their learning. Pupils' responses help us to tune into their minds, how they think and see what they do and don't know. Regular reflection points in lessons and recordings of this are invaluable to support pupil progress.

5. **We use effective questioning techniques and encourage children to ask questions to further their own learning**

When asking questions we need to ensure we ask open ended questions that can have more than one possible answer. Open ended questions deepen the children's understanding and require them to reflect. We need to break away from the teachers' addiction to the 'right answer' and away from the children trying to guess the right answer. Productive questions include sentence starters such as;
- What do you think?
- Why do you think that?
- How do you know?
- Do you have a reason?
- Can you be sure?
- Is there another way?

6. **We promote an active balance of talk in classroom by both teacher and pupils.**

    Most common examples of teaching practice are when either the teacher or pupil is passive. In a true dialogic classroom pupils actively engage and teachers constructively intervene.

7. **We develop talk charters to establish high expectations of talk and dialogue in the classroom**

    At the beginning of the year we open up discussions with the pupils on why they feel talk is important to their learning. What skills demonstrate excellent talk and dialogue? Children are given interactive activities to engage in talk to then be able to identify the skills they had to demonstrate to be successful in their task. The key findings from the children are put on display and regularly referred to in teaching and learning to emphasize high expectations of talk and dialogue in the classroom.

8. **We are aware of implications of scaffolding too much, leading to passive pupils becoming 'experts' in seeking help**

    Pupils need the opportunity to explore and discover new learning for themselves. They need to have the time to think things through rather than have constant scaffolding and prompting. Allow pupils to think for themselves how they could solve a problem or what additional resources they could access to support their understanding.

9. **We understand the power of teaching from misconceptions and allowing pupils the opportunity to talk through the processes of identifying their misconception**

    It is essential for our pupils to identify when they have a misconception in their learning and the opportunity to think and talk it through so that they can articulate their own journey to understanding a key concept. We need to ensure this is within a climate where all pupils feel safe to make mistakes and develop from these.

10. **We model thoughts out loud to encourage higher order thinking skills**

    It is essential that we provide role models of language for our pupils and critical thinking skills. Pupils especially benefit from the modeling of inter-thinking between adults in the classroom.

3. **Barriers**

    The greatest barrier to schools developing quality oracy and dialogue in classrooms is access to professional learning and development. We are very fortunate that we have a strong culture of engagement with research at Highlands Primary School with our Head Learning Leader having a Doctorate in Education and 10 members of the teaching team having completed their masters. We have strong links to our local university to support pedagogical approaches. This is not the case for the vast majority of schools. We are a school that engages in action research and lesson study to develop and evolve practice and this can be a barrier if teachers work in environments where schemes are used and there is not a strong focus upon knowledge mobilisation within the organization. We would say the greatest barrier is the national accountability measures that takes no consideration of oracy, but rather promotes oracy as a tokenistic part of the national curriculum. In a strong accountability framework, attention needs to be

given to the recognition of the value of oracy skills. We believe that dialogic teaching and a focus on oracy enables children to develop skills across the curriculum, as well as their self-confidence and personal development. Our work and the work of others needs to be shared more widely to empower leaders in schools to promote a oracy rich classroom. The inspection framework also needs to ensure it includes a focus on children's development of speaking and listening skills. In our recent inspection the Ofsted inspector was not fully aware of pedagogy around dialogic teaching and learning and had to have it explicitly explained and demonstrated. This should not be the case, the very people evaluating should be research informed.

Submitted by Mrs Sandeep Kaur (Deputy Head)- Senior Learning Leader and Dr Kulvarn Atwal (Headteacher) Head Learning Leader, Highlands Primary School.

References

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Additional guidance:

Value and impact

1. Given many teachers recognise the importance of oracy, why does spoken language not have the same status as reading and writing in our education system? Should it have the same status, and if so why?

2. What are the consequences if children and young people do not receive oracy education?

3. What is the value and impact of quality oracy education at i) different life stages, ii) in different settings, and iii) on different types of pupils (for instance pupils from varied socioeconomic backgrounds or with special educational needs)?

4. How can it help deliver the wider curriculum at school?

5. What is the impact of quality oracy education on future life chances? Specifically, how does it affect employment and what value do businesses give oracy?

6. What do children and young people at school and entering employment want to be able to access, what skills to they want to leave school with?

7. What is the value and impact of oracy education in relation to other key agendas such as social mobility and wellbeing/ mental health?

8. How can the ability to communicate effectively contribute to engaging more young people from all backgrounds to become active citizens, participating fully in social action and public life as adults

Provision and access

1. What should high quality oracy education look like?

2. Can you provide evidence of how oracy education is being provided in different areas/education settings/extra-curricular provision, by teachers but also other practitioners that work with children?

3. What are the views of teachers, school leaders and educational bodies regarding the current provision of oracy education?

4. Where can we identify good practice and can you give examples?

5. What factors create unequal access to oracy education (i.e. socio-economic, region, type of school, special needs)? How can these factors be overcome?

6. Relating to region more specifically, how should an oracy-focused approach be altered depending on the context?

Barriers

1. What are the barriers that teachers face in providing quality oracy education, within the education system and beyond?

2. What support do teachers need to improve the delivery of oracy education?

3. What accountability is currently present in the system? How can we further incentivise teachers to deliver more oracy education to children and young people?

4. What is the role of government and other bodies in creating greater incentives and how can this be realised?

5. What is the role of assessment in increasing provision of oracy education? What is the most appropriate form of assessment of oracy skills?

6. Are the speaking and listening elements of the current curriculum sufficient in order to deliver high quality oracy education?

7. What is the best approach – more accountability within the system or a less prescriptive approach?

8. Are there examples of other educational pedagogies where provision has improved and we can draw parallels and learn lessons?